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OCI 2346-73
4 October 1973

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: IRAQ: Genesis and Assessment of the 30 June
Abortive Coup and on-going Instability

The abortive coup on 30 June and persistent signs of instability since then signify a deep power struggle within the Baath Party regime headed by President al-Bakr and party chief Saddam Husayn Tikriti. Infighting has been the hallmark of the regime virtually since the Baath took over in its own right in 1968, but it appears to have become particularly intense in recent months.

Although ideological differences may lie at the base of the power struggle, they are not as important as the personalities. We have no clear fix on precisely who is leading the opposition, nor how powerful they are. But the regime is clearly nervous. It has tried to win broad popular support by easing restrictions and making promises of democratization, and has combined these with harsh suppression of known opponents. It has also tried to gather support through a national front to which the Iraqi Communist Party has adhered, and it is also trying to remove the difficulties that it faces from the Kurdish nationalist movement, urging the Kurds to join the front.

Bakr, representing military interests, and Saddam Husayn, representing the civilian element of the party, have been in strong competition in the past, but they have been working closely since June to restore a semblance of stability and unity within the country--and also in the interest of mutual survival.

Both Bakr and Saddam Husayn have been running scared, especially since the abortive coup. The extraordinary security measures in Baghdad this past week, including a curfew and airport and border closure, and widespread house-to-house search, are probably part of the continuing

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power struggle, although they were keyed to a recent rash of brutal murders in Baghdad. The most recent searches and seizures were carried out by police under the Ministry of Interior rather than by the army, as has been the practice in the past. Saddam Husayn evidently wants to keep the army out of the struggle. The original coup attempt in June involved primarily security forces under Security Chief Nazim Kazzar, with only a few junior army officers attached to him picked up in the post-coup dragnet.

The efforts of the past three months have failed to clear up the problem. Pamphlets attacking the regime are circulating. One of these calls for the return to power of General Salah Mahdi Ammash, until recently the Iraqi Ambassador to the USSR, and Abd-al-Karim al-Shaykhly, a former Iraqi foreign minister now a member of the Iraqi delegation to the UN. The pamphlet also called upon the cadre of the Baath Party to "correct the deviation" which has taken place within the party. These pamphlets have brought the power struggle more into public view.

Meanwhile, a side effect of the power struggle has been a slight opening of windows to the West, particularly in commercial matters. We think this is a sign that the regime hopes both to divert attention from domestic difficulties and to broaden its support. What this means as far as the US is concerned is not yet clear. There is no evidence that this situation will produce any major breakthrough in Iraq-US relations; a major deviation from Iraq's alignment with the USSR also seems unlikely. Indeed, Iraq's recent acquisition of supersonic medium bombers underlines Iraqi dependence on Moscow.

All things considered, caution is dictated in dealing with Iraq; the basic problems of a country ridden with political and religious factions are likely to persist and to plague its foreign relations whatever the particular coloration of the government of the day.

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